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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

In re Application of : DECISION ON PETITION
Kovar et al. :
Application No. 09/898,379 :
Filed: 5 July, 2001 :
Atty Docket No. 10-342 :

This is a decision on the renewed petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a),¹ filed on 18 April, 2005, to revive the above-identified application.

The petition is again **DISMISSED**.

Any request for reconsideration of this decision must be submitted within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. Extensions of time under 37 CFR 1.136(a) are permitted. The reconsideration request should include a cover

¹ A grantable petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) must be accompanied by:

(1) the required reply, unless previously filed; In a nonprovisional application abandoned for failure to prosecute, the required reply may be met by the filing of a continuing application. In a nonprovisional utility or plant application filed on or after June 8, 1995, and abandoned for failure to prosecute, the required reply may also be met by the filing of a request for continued examination in compliance with § 1.114. In an application or patent, abandoned or lapsed for failure to pay the issue fee or any portion thereof, the required reply must be the payment of the issue fee or any outstanding balance thereof.

(2) the petition fee as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(1);

(3) a showing to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) was unavoidable; and

(4) any terminal disclaimer (and fee as set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(d)) required pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(c)).

letter entitled "Renewed Petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a)" or "Renewed Petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b)." This is not a final agency decision.

This application became abandoned on 8 September, 2004, for failure to timely submit a reply to the non-final Office action mailed on 7 June, 2004, which set a three (3) month shortened statutory period for reply. No extensions of time under 37 CFR 1.136(a) were obtained. Notice of Abandonment was mailed on 26 January, 2005. The petition filed on 2 February, 2005, was dismissed on 18 February, 2005.

Petitioners again assert unavoidable delay in filing a timely reply because of a docketing error. Specifically, petitioners allege an error on the part of counsel's Assistant Manager of Administrative Services.

The Commissioner may revive an abandoned application if the delay in responding to the relevant outstanding Office requirement is shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner to be "unavoidable".² Decisions on reviving abandoned applications on the basis of "unavoidable" delay have adopted the reasonably prudent person standard in determining if the delay was unavoidable:

The word 'unavoidable' . . . is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business. It permits them in the exercise of this care to rely upon the ordinary and trustworthy agencies of mail and telegraph, worthy and reliable employees, and such other means and instrumentalities as are usually employed in such important business. If unexpectedly, or through the unforeseen fault or imperfection of these agencies and instrumentalities, there occurs a failure, it may properly be said to be unavoidable, all other conditions of promptness in its rectification being present.³

²35 U.S.C. § 133.

³In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (1912) (quoting Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (1887)); see also Winkler v. Ladd, 221 F. Supp. 550, 552, 138 USPQ 666, 167-68 (D.D.C. 1963), aff'd, 143 USPQ 172 (D.C. Cir. 1963); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (1913). In addition, decisions on revival are made on a "case-by-case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account."

The showing of record is inadequate to establish unavoidable delay within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. § 133 and 37 CFR 1.137(a).⁴ Specifically, an application is "unavoidably" abandoned only where petitioner, or counsel for petitioner, takes all action necessary for a proper response to the outstanding Office action, but through the intervention of unforeseen circumstances, such as failure of mail, telegraph, facsimile, or the negligence of otherwise reliable employees, the response is not timely received in the Office.⁵

Turning to petitioner's assertion of docketing error, a delay resulting from an error (e.g. a docketing error) on the part of an employee in the performance of a clerical function may provide the basis for a showing of "unavoidable" delay, provided it is shown that:

(1) the error was the cause of the delay at issue;

(2) there was in place a business routine for performing the clerical function that could reasonably be relied upon to avoid errors in its performance; and

(3) the employee was sufficiently trained and experienced with regard to the function and routine for its performance that reliance upon such employee represented the exercise of due care.⁶

An adequate showing requires:

(i) Statements by all persons with direct knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the delay, setting forth the facts as they know them.

Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982). Finally, a petition cannot be granted where a petitioner has failed to meet his or her burden of establishing that the delay was "unavoidable." Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316-17, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1131-32 (N.D. Ind. 1987).

⁴See MPEP 711(c)(III)(C)(2) for a discussion of the requirements for a showing of unavoidable delay.

⁵Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31 (Comm'r Pat. 1887).

⁶See MPEP 711.03(c)(III)(C)(2).

(ii) Petitioner must supply a thorough explanation of the docketing call-up system in use and identify the type of records kept and the person responsible for the maintenance of the system. This showing must include copies of mail ledger, docket sheets, filewrappers and such other records as may exist which would substantiate an error in docketing, and include an indication as to why the system failed to provide adequate notice that a reply was due.

(iii) Petitioner must supply information regarding the training provided to the personnel responsible for the docketing error, degree of supervision of their work, examples of other work functions carried out, and checks on the described work which were used to assure proper execution of assigned tasks.

The petition lacks the showing required by item (1) above.

It is noted that petitioners have provided a detailed description of counsel's docketing system and have discussed the training and experience of the employee responsible for docketing the Office action mailed on 7 June, 2004. Petitioners have not provided a statement by Elizabeth Hein, the employee who was responsible for docketing the Office action for reply, however. A statement by the individual who made the alleged error is required as a part of the showing of unavoidable delay. Thus, petitioners should provide an affidavit or declaration of facts, setting forth the circumstances which render the delay in replying to the Office action mailed on 7 June, 2004, unavoidable, by Ms. Hein with any renewed petition.

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:

By mail: Mail Stop Petition
Commissioner for Patents
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By FAX: (703) 872-9306
Attn: Office of Petitions

By hand: Customer Service Window
Mail Stop Petition
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Telephone inquiries concerning this matter may be directed to the undersigned at (571)272-3231.



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